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# Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

*Provisional*

## 6114th meeting

Wednesday, 29 April 2009, 10 a.m.
New York

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| *President:* | Ms. Espinosa Cantellano/Mr. Heller | (Mexico) |
| *Members:* | Austria | Mr. Mayr-Harting |
| | Burkina Faso | Mr. Tiendrébéogo |
| | China | Mr. La Yifan |
| | Costa Rica | Mr. Guillermet |
| | Croatia | Mr. Vilović |
| | France | Mr. Ripert |
| | Japan | Mr. Takasu |
| | Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | Mr. Shalgham |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Churkin |
| | Turkey | Mr. Ilkin |
| | Uganda | Mr. Mugoya |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Sir John Sawers |
| | United States of America | Ms. Rice |
| | Viet Nam | Mr. Bui The Giang |

**Agenda**

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158)

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09-31649 (E)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**Children and armed conflict**

**Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158)**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chad, Chile, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, the Netherlands, Peru, the Philippines, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand and Uruguay, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda.

In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

*At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.*

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to take this opportunity to welcome the fact that there is some much interest in participating in the debate on this issue, which is of particular importance for the international community.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend invitations under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/158, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

In my capacity as President, I should like to say how very honoured I am to be here today. My presence is an indication of the importance that Mexico attaches to the work of the Security Council and to its presidency. It also provides me an opportunity to thank all members for the support they have provided to Mexico's presidency throughout this month.

I would also like to point out that, as everyone is aware, Mexico is currently experiencing a very complex situation as a result of the emergence of swine flu, which has now begun to spread to other parts of the world. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that the Mexican Government has acted with complete transparency and a sense of responsibility — not just towards Mexican citizens but also towards all of the world's inhabitants. In that regard, I should like to reassure everyone that Mexico will continue to act in that same spirit of responsibility and transparency in the face of a situation that poses a challenge not only for Mexico but for humankind as a whole. We will do so in order to build the necessary bridges and establish cooperation with each and every member of the international community to confront that challenge.

I also wish to point to the manner in which we have been working with the World Health Organization. That once again illustrates the importance of international multilateral institutions in ensuring well-being, peace and security throughout the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the many and varied expressions of solidarity and support from many friendly countries. I should like to assure them that the Government and people of Mexico are deeply appreciative. We shall utilize that assistance in a responsible and efficient manner to benefit not only

Mexico but also, as I said earlier, the entire international community.

I am particularly pleased at the presence at this meeting of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on whom I now call.

**The Secretary-General**: I should like to thank you, Madam President, for your participation in, and organization of, today's important debate. You have shown great commitment to this issue, including as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Before I proceed with my remarks, I should like to say how relieved and encouraged I am by what you have just said with regard to the spread of swine flu. As this swine flu has spread to many parts of the world, including the United States, it has become another global challenge, which requires global coordination and support.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I wish to inform all of you that all United Nations agencies are now mobilizing their resources to play a leading role, led by Dr. Margaret Chan of the World Health Organization (WHO). I have also expressed my position as the Secretary-General. We are now meeting with core groups under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General in close coordination with the World Health Organization.

Member States have the full support and full commitment of the United Nations and I sincerely hope that with full global participation and support we will be able to overcome and combat the swine flu, which is now a very important challenge for us. In addition to the global financial crisis, climate change, the energy crisis and the food crisis; we are now experiencing this very serious pandemic. It requires the cooperation of the entire international community and I count on the leadership and commitment of not only Council member States, but the whole international community.

Let me return to today's topic.

It is said that truth is the first casualty of war. When it comes to the youngest victims, what they lose first is their childhood. Fighting shatters more than infrastructure; it destroys the precious principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As bombs devastate schools, hospitals and families, children lose their right to education, health care and love. Far too many even lose their right to life.

I have witnessed scenes of unbearable suffering. Never have I been so outraged as when I recently spoke with girls who had been sexually victimized during the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Painful as it is to describe those atrocities, silence serves only to shield the perpetrators and perpetuate their crimes. The testimony of the victims — their dignity even after such appalling violations — made me more determined than ever to raise my voice to decry their suffering and to demand action.

Today's meeting again affirms that the plight of children caught in conflict zones is a threat to international peace and security. Since 1998, the Council has adopted six resolutions aimed at stopping the recruitment of child soldiers, the killing, maiming and rape of children, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals and obstacles to humanitarian access.

The Council has done more than adopt resolutions. It has established a working group on the topic, as well as a monitoring mechanism that reports to that group on grave violations against children in situations of concern. For my part, I have asked my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to take those efforts even further.

Later in this meeting, you will hear from Grace Akallo, a former child soldier. If, after all she has endured, she can come before this Council as an advocate for peace, Council members must respond to her courage and resilience with action. With that in mind, I want to focus the rest of my remarks on what I believe the Council should do next. My appeal is also directed at parties to conflicts and the broader international community. My latest report on the question of children and armed conflict is now before you (S/2009/158). Its annexes name 56 parties, including States and non-State actors, which recruit child soldiers and commit other grave violations. Of these, 19 are persistent violators, who have been listed for more than four years.

I urge the Council to consider action to strike a blow against impunity and to stop those violators from continuing to victimize children. The protection framework needs to be strengthened. I recommend that the Council, at a minimum, expand the criteria for the annexes of my report to include parties that commit rape and other grave sexual violence against children in armed conflict.

Last year, the Council adopted a milestone resolution, Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), which focused specifically on sexual and gender-based violence. That was a crucial step. But it will have true meaning only when its provisions are translated into action. I urge the Council to expand the trigger of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to include sexual violence and, if possible, intentional killing and maiming of children. That is a crucial first step towards accountability for those terrible crimes.

We must also do everything possible to ensure that no matter how severely conflicts may rage, schools are always protected. We must support the efforts of our humanitarian partners to keep schools running in times of crisis and to safeguard the right to education. I call on all parties to conflicts to keep schools as safe zones for both boys and girls.

All countries and all groups must put the protection of children in situations of armed conflict above politics. I urge Member States to allow contact between the United Nations and non-State actors with a view to ensuring the protection of vulnerable children. We need to work with such parties in order to prepare action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children. We need to engage them so that they undertake specific commitments to address all grave violations committed against children.

I also urge all States that have not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so without delay. We have an impressive 193 parties to the Convention, but only 127 of them have ratified the Protocol. That instrument should be universal.

Donors also have a special role to play. The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups advocate a comprehensive approach to reintegrating children into their communities. Donor contributions can make this happen.

I appeal strongly to parties to conflict to comply with international humanitarian law for the protection of children and all civilians. And finally, I stress the role of the Council in holding violators accountable. We must send a strong signal to the world that those committing appalling crimes against children in conflict situations will be brought to justice.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement. I now give the floor to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

**Ms. Coomaraswamy**: I thank the Council for convening this open debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict. Madam President, your presence here today testifies to the commitment of the Council to this issue and the crucial leadership of Mexico as the new chair of the Security Council Working Group, following the exemplary leadership of France.

Before the Council is the eighth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158). I am glad to convey to Council members today that progress has been made, especially in addressing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and I would like to start here with these positive and encouraging developments. Thanks to the continuing efforts of the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, five action plans have been secured to date, in Côte d'Ivoire, Sri Lanka, the Sudan and Uganda, and four others are in the process of being finalized in the Philippines, the Central African Republic and Burundi. As a result, six parties have already been removed from the "list of shame". These developments demonstrate the power of the Council's focused attention and continuing engagement, and serves as a testament that it should continue to maintain pressure on violators to enter into a protection dialogue with the United Nations.

I am also encouraged that some Governments, including that of Myanmar, have recently approached my Office and their respective United Nations country teams to deepen their engagement with the recommendations of the Security Council Working Group. In Nepal, discussions are continuing and planning is under way for the release of 3,000 minors in Maoist cantonments. However, the recent crisis between the Maoists and the Nepalese Army may impede the progress hoped for. I strongly urge that the Government release the children as a matter of urgency. Just this morning, I was informed that the Justice and Equality Movement in the Sudan is in final discussions with the United Nations country team on finalizing an action plan.

This hope must be tempered, however, as the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158) continues to present a disturbing picture of grave violations committed against children around the globe. This year, the report identifies 20 situations of concern, where children remain vulnerable to abuse. The report chronicles 56 parties that continue to recruit and use children as child soldiers. A number of these groups simply refuse to enter into dialogue on action plans, while others, though willing to enter into dialogue, are prevented from doing so because the Member State concerned has prevented the United Nations from approaching non-State actors to devise action plans.

In this report, the Secretary-General has named 19 persistent violators who have been listed in the annexes for four years or more. The Council must now ensure that its words are not empty threats. Much depends on the Council taking measures against those who have repeatedly flouted its resolutions and who continue to recruit and use children. It is now crucial for the Council to move forward by beginning a discussion about the process by which targeted measures might be applied against repeat offenders.

In situations where sanctions committees already exist it is easier to envision such action. More systematic communications between the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the relevant sanctions committees and expert groups is critical in this regard. In other cases where sanctions infrastructure does not exist, innovative solutions are necessary to ensure that violators are held accountable.

This open debate on children and armed conflict must be an occasion for the Council to reinforce its commitment to children and advance its protection agenda even further. The Council has already created powerful and unprecedented tools for enhancing the capabilities of child-protection actors on the ground, particularly as they deal with the issue of child soldiers. The decision of the Council to demand that annexes of the report of the Secretary-General contain lists of parties to conflict that recruit and use children and to consider possible targeted measures against them has led to thousands of children being identified and released. Armed actor after armed actor has told me that they are determined to be removed from the Secretary-General's annexes. This list of shame has been a rallying point for all those who want to increase the protection of children in conflict areas. In this sense, the power of the Council can make and has made a tangible difference in protecting children from being recruited and used by armed forces and groups.

However, these successes have also created an imbalance in the focus of the Council, especially with regard to all other grave violations. The moment is now ripe for the Council to extend its focus beyond child soldiers to deal more effectively with other violations. Not to do so threatens to silence the suffering of thousands of children who are subjected to unspeakable crimes. Ideally, the list of the Secretary-General should include all grave violations against children to ensure that the framework for protecting children in situations of armed conflict is comprehensive. However, since expectations do not always match realities, the United Nations and its partners have chosen to call upon the Council to take a gradualist path towards the expansion of the protection framework for children.

That is why the child-protection community is unanimously calling on the Council to begin, at a minimum, with expanding the listing criteria to include those who commit rape and other grave sexual violence against children, as a first step in this incremental approach. The inclusion of intentional killing and maiming of children in line with international humanitarian law would also be an important contribution to protecting children. That would be a critical step forward, recognizing that sexual violence and intentional killing and maiming are heinous crimes on a par with the recruitment and use of children.

In my travels to conflict affected areas around the globe I have had the chance to meet dozens of courageous and talented people who are working for the protection of conflict-affected children. These staff members come from funds, programmes and agencies like UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNIFEM and our non-governmental organization partners, reflecting the ever more mainstreamed nature of child protection throughout the United Nations system, as called for by the Security Council and our Secretary-General himself. I would like to thank UNICEF in particular for assisting me in my field visits.

I am pleased to see that the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations has just finalized its child protection policy, which I fully endorse and which, I am sure, my colleague Mr. Le Roy will elaborate upon. I cannot stress enough the centrality of United Nations peacekeeping and child-protection advisers to the monitoring and reporting mechanism that is called for in resolution 1612 (2005). That is why it is also critical for the Security Council to ensure that its investment in protecting children is more systematically reflected in country-specific resolutions, with the inclusion on a more consistent basis of child-protection provisions, including child-protection advisers, in the mandates of peacekeeping operations and political missions.

The Security Council and the General Assembly have repeatedly urged me to undertake field missions in order to monitor country situations, to be an independent moral voice for the sake of children and to advocate for their needs. My most recent trips have been to Gaza and southern Israel and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Dungu, in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where I recently visited, 990 people have been killed and 300 children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) since September 2008, and people are now just hiding in the bush to escape. In North Kivu, the rapid integration of Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP) and other armed groups into the Congolese Armed Forces has resulted in children being incorporated into the ranks of the national army. Although 1,300 have been released to child-protection partners, many more remain as child soldiers.

In South Kivu, impending Operation Kimia II, a joint military operation by the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), raises serious concerns about large-scale displacement, the use of children as soldiers and the possibility of exactions committed by uncontrolled armed units against civilian populations. With the United Nations taking part in offensive military operations, it is crucial that the Council follow those developments carefully in order to ensure that children are protected to the maximum extent possible.

In February, I visited Gaza and southern Israel after weeks of war. As it was just days after the fighting had ended, the children, their teachers and parents in Gaza were still in a state of shock and they had horror in their eyes. The children demand accountability, and the international community must respond. The crossings must be opened, and reconstruction must begin in haste. Everyone hopes for peace, and in southern Israel, where children also live in fear, girls and boys speak freely of reaching out to their Palestinian brothers and sisters.

In Sri Lanka, the situation remains deplorable for children in the north and the east. In the near future, I intend to send a special envoy to begin consultations with the Government. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam continue to recruit children to fight on the front lines, and they use force to keep many of the civilians, including children, in harm's way. The United Nations has urged the Government to practice military forbearance and to maintain a prolonged pause in the fighting, so that humanitarian workers can help negotiate safe passage for the remaining civilians. It is incumbent upon the Government to protect its citizens to the maximum extent possible and to refrain from using heavy artillery.

Humanitarian actors have urged that the internally displaced person camps set up by the Government meet international standards. We hope short-term military gain will not blind the authorities to the long-term demands of reconciliation. People stripped of their dignity are unlikely to forget, especially the children.

My field visits and the information contained in this report must be supplemented by the harrowing experience of children on the ground. Later this morning, you will hear from Grace, a former girl soldier, who will describe to the Council what she went through and what she and other children like her hope to receive from this body. While visiting North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I met a 12-year-old girl named Adila. She told me that she had joined the Mai Mai militia because her parents could no longer pay for school and because she thought carrying a gun would protect her from being raped. However, like thousands of other children in the Congo and despite her gun, Adila was sexually violated and abused by her commanders. In the camp she was always near starvation but had to fetch water, cook and clean in addition to her combatant activities.

Recently, Mai Mai groups have entered into the peace process, and Adila was identified and released by MONUC child protection. She is now in a non-governmental organization transit centre supported by UNICEF and has just gone back to school. Her eyes lit up when she told me that she plans to be a school teacher.

What am I to say to Adila, Grace and the hundreds of other girl and boy victims of sexual violence whom I meet on my missions to conflict-affected countries? Is it fair to say that those children suffer second-class violation and that the Council does not wish to apply the same focus and engagement to them? In my heart of hearts, I believe that that is not the intention of the international community and that this day will mark a new age in what my predecessor called the era of application.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Coomaraswamy for her briefing and for the work that she is carrying out on this very sensitive issue.

I now give the floor to Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

**Mr. Le Roy** (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to say to all present what an honour it is that they are participating with us in this important Security Council debate on our commitment to the vital topic of children in armed conflict.

In adopting resolution 1261 (1999), the Security Council formally recognized that the protection of children in armed conflict was crucial to peace and security. The Security Council thus included specific and very precise provisions on the protection of children in several mandates of peacekeeping operations and has consistently demanded that the protection of the rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict be taken into account in all peace processes and peace agreements as well as in post-conflict and reconstruction phases.

For the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the protection of children affected by armed conflict is therefore a fundamental element both of our strategy and of our daily commitment. For that reason, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has already put a large number of measures in place.

(*spoke in English*)

As a first step, DPKO established in-house capacity for child protection in the form of child protection advisers in 2001. The Council's sustained support for the role of child protection advisers in relevant peacekeeping operations has enabled us to deploy advisers to the eight most significant peacekeeping operations to date, with the most recent deployment, at the beginning of 2009, to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur mission and to the United Nations Mission of Assistance in Afghanistan. We have also built up a supporting capacity of child-protection expertise composed of both international and national staff. The latter, comprising over 40 per cent of the total staffing for child protection, serve as a key resource for our work due to their knowledge of local norms and communities. They also remain as an important national capacity when the United Nations and the peacekeeping operation ultimately wind up. This investment has yielded concrete outcomes and enhanced the mainstreaming of concern for children affected by conflict in our operation.

First, child protection advisers support heads of mission in integrating key child protection concerns into all stages of the peace process and the overall strategy of the peacekeeping operation, including, of course, negotiation with Governments, armed groups and parties to a conflict. In Burundi, for example, the release of former child combatants associated with the Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu-Forces nationales de libération was placed at the heart of the negotiation as a priority item on the agenda of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, resulting in the release of 340 such combatants in Burundi this month alone.

Verification efforts to identify children in assembly areas are ongoing. The significant developments are the result of concerted and sustained advocacy and the engagement of the facilitator, the Political Directorate and the United Nations system, including, of course, the United Nations Mission in Burundi and UNICEF, with the support of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Secondly, peacekeeping operations are now increasingly able to leverage their political resources and offer means to promote the protection of children

in armed conflict and to address violations of children's rights. Regarding the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I have just clearly heard the legitimate concern expressed by the Secretary-General's Special Representative, but I can also say that significant progress on the release of children in North Kivu was registered after a lengthy peace process following an extensive and high-level sensitization campaign that targeted local communities, armed forces and armed groups on national and international standards prohibiting the use of children by armed groups and armed forces, implemented by MONUC jointly with UNICEF in June 2008. At the first point of contact with armed groups in the field, MONUC military units and military observers, deployed in remote and otherwise inaccessible areas, have contributed to the release of children by signalling the presence of children in armed groups and by providing information, security and critical logistic support for their release.

While there was a significant setback during the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and increased reports of re-recruitment of children during this period, MONUC and UNICEF have continued to tap into military resources in their work to secure the release of children from armed forces and from armed groups. Child protection focal points have been established in military contingents across various missions in places such as the Sudan, Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire. Mainstreaming child protection concerns in the activities of peacekeeping operations has been further enhanced through close cooperation between child protection staff and other mission components, particularly those concerned with human rights, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the rule of law and justice, security sector reform, gender, conduct and discipline — all the different units within our peacekeeping operations.

Thirdly, and most important, our peacekeeping operations have increasingly engaged in the implementation of important child protection priorities spelled out in the relevant Security Council resolutions. These include training all peacekeeping personnel on child protection and child rights, dialogue with parties to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups and the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms established under resolution 1612 (2005).

The training of peacekeeping personnel in child protection and child rights is a continuing priority for us and is now included as an integral part of the pre-deployment curriculum for civilians. Training material on child protection and child rights have been developed in various missions and have been used in induction training for all incoming force contingents and civilian components. The training is aimed at creating awareness of course, on the impact of armed conflict on children and knowledge of the international legal norms and standards that govern the protection and promotion of children's rights.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the Mission has partnered with Save the Children to implement a training-of-trainers programme for United Nations military and police representatives. That training equips them with information and tools to deliver training on child protection within their teams, thereby widening our reach through the military. The impact of in-mission training on the work of missions is bearing fruit and has promoted a child-conscious approach in the work of United Nations police and military. For example, in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti, training in child rights and child protection has now been fully integrated into the capacity-building activities provided by the United Nations police for national police units.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism is an important tool for holding perpetrators of violations of child rights accountable, in order to prevent further violation and to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflict. As the Council knows, DPKO co-chairs the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting, along with UNICEF, in seven peacekeeping operations in the Sudan, Chad, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire.

Within the area of a mission, our child protection teams conduct systematic monitoring and reporting and support the preparation of specific reports in collaboration with UNICEF, United Nations country task forces and other units of the mission, especially those concerned with human rights.

Integrated with the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism is systematic follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations of the Security Council. In Côte d'Ivoire, following the de-listing of parties to conflict from the annexes to the

Secretary-General's reports, the mission has turned its attention to its tasks. In January this year, the mission received a programme of action from the Forces de défense et de sécurité des Forces nouvelles undertaking to combat sexual violence, as requested by the Security Council Working Group in its recent conclusions on Côte d'Ivoire.

(*spoke in French*)

In order to consolidate and further institutionalize our commitment to children in armed conflict within the framework of our missions, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has established a programme in all departments to make protecting children in armed conflicts a benchmark for all our operations. That policy has been formulated on the basis of broad consultations among our missions in the field; Headquarters, of course, here in New York; UNICEF; and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as many other key actors. We are also working to harmonize all elements of our protection activities, particularly within the framework of resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict; resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence against women; and resolution 1674 (2006).

Finally, I should like to assure members of the tireless commitment of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to supporting this issue in all our activities. My Department has committed itself to ensuring very close follow-up to the resolutions adopted by the Security Council so that we can continue to help to ensure that children have prospects for tangible and lasting peace. To that end, we are obviously continuing our close collaboration and full cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and the United Nations country teams. Of course, we are, as always, counting on the support of the Security Council to back us in this essential task.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Le Roy for his statement.

I shall now give the floor to Ms. Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

**Ms. Veneman**: I thank members for the opportunity to join them today as the Security Council discusses the situation of children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF appreciates the engagement and dedication of the Council to the matter of children affected by armed conflict and thanks the Secretary-General for his continuous and personal interest and commitment to this issue. Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, has been unrelenting and very effective in her work on behalf of children affected by armed conflict.

I should also like to express special appreciation for the leadership of the Government of Mexico on this issue. This collective engagement at the highest possible level is making a real difference in the lives of children by serving as a strong platform for advocacy and responses for boys and girls in conflict situations.

Millions of children around the world continue to be impacted by armed conflict. In fact, for many, conflict is all they know. Too often, children see their childhoods drift into turmoil, their family and friends killed and their lives, health and well-being put at risk. Sadly, that is the situation today for many children in Sri Lanka.

It comes as no surprise that under-five mortality rates are among the highest in conflict-affected countries. Children are not only the unintended victims of war; in some cases, they are directly targeted. The Secretary-General's reports produced by the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by the Security Council bear witness to that. Each of the incidents reported represents a personal tragedy. I have met boys and girls who have been brutally raped by soldiers and scarred for life — some having contracted HIV — and children who were recruited by armed groups and used as soldiers or sex slaves.

In places such as Afghanistan, schools have been attacked and teachers, and particularly girl students, have been targeted by horrendous acts. When I visited Gaza earlier this year, I saw schools damaged or destroyed and children suffering from the trauma of violence and the loss of loved ones. Sadly, as the report illustrates, disrespect for the sanctity of schools continues to be the situation in far too many countries.

Children remain the victims of the wars of adults, but there are also some glimmers of hope. Just a few weeks ago, 342 children in Burundi were released after a year of joint advocacy by child protection partners. Since January 2009, around 1,200 children in North

Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have been released by armed groups and forces.

Dialogue on children's issues with parties to conflict is an important element and has resulted in concrete commitments and action plans to prevent and end grave violations against children. The monitoring and reporting mechanism has become a key component of UNICEF's overall child protection strategy of enhancing the protective environment for children in situations of armed conflict. Monitoring and reporting are also important tools in triggering effective responses and prevention activities.

UNICEF's responses to children who are victims of grave violations include support for national child protection systems and survivors of sexual violence, along with rights training for armed forces personnel and the reintegration of children used by armed forces.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Just last December, UNICEF welcomed the adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Around 40 per cent of all civilians killed or injured by cluster munitions are children. Next year will mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and this year marks the tenth anniversary of the first Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict, namely, resolution 1261 (1999).

Those milestones have contributed to a stronger protection framework for children in armed conflict, and we must build on that momentum to do even more. UNICEF welcomes the eighth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158), and we support its recommendations.

I note in particular the recommendation to expand the triggers to be listed in the annexes of the report to parties who commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children and, if possible, other grave violations, such as intentional killing and maiming. Such a development would be an important step forward, particularly to address sexual violence. It would also send a strong signal from the international community that perpetrators of grave violations, such as rape and sexual violence, must be held accountable for their crimes against children.

Although challenges lie ahead, progress has been made. UNICEF remains committed to working with and for children in armed conflict, including through continued efforts to monitor, report and respond to grave violations. Adherence to international humanitarian law and respect for children's rights must be strengthened, and those who commit violations against children must be held accountable.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Veneman for her statement.

I shall now give the floor to Ms. Grace Akallo, a former child soldier of Uganda.

**Ms. Akallo**: I thank the Council for inviting me to give a small voice to the many voiceless children in war. My name is Grace Akallo. I am from Uganda, and I was born in northern Uganda. I am here to talk not only about my own story but on behalf of all the children in armed conflict, who have to face and survive the atrocities of war, who suffer through the abuses of being used as child soldiers and through rape and sexual abuse. I am thankful that representatives are here at the highest level, and, to me, it means that you care, and that you are decision makers who want to show their commitment to stopping the suffering of children in wars.

Allow me to tell you my story. After elementary school, my parents sent me to St. Mary's College Aboke, a high school for girls in northern Uganda. I stayed in a dormitory with dozens of girls from far away. I was excited because only a few girls from my village went to high school. I had learned the advantages of education. I was determined to be the first person to go to university in my village.

Sadly, my dream of a great future was cut short when, in October 1996, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) stormed into my dorm and abducted 139 girls, including me. I was among the first five who were tied and pushed to move out. We were forced by the LRA soldiers to form four straight lines and were marched out into the woods. I knew at that moment that there was no surviving. My spirit died. My body was constantly wet with urine.

Sister Rachele, the Deputy Headmistress at the school, followed the rebels. She had no power. The rebels threatened to kill or rape her in front of us. She was asked to leave, but she refused to leave without her children. She stood her ground and, in the end, she was

released with 109 girls. I was not one of the lucky ones though, as I was among the 30 that were forced to remain.

After a month of wandering in the northern Uganda forest, we were divided into two groups to make it easier to control our march to southern Sudan. On the way, many children who could not walk were killed and their bodies abandoned in the forest. The rebels would use sticks, axes, bayonets or machetes.

When we arrived in Sudan, I and my friends were given AK-47s. We were taught to dismantle, clean and assemble the gun. My group was not taught to shoot or to fight. We were told hunger would actually teach us, and indeed it did. My friends and I were sent to battle against the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) several times. Hunger and thirst were the order of the day. During the long march back from battle against the SPLA, I fainted from thirst and hunger, and the LRA actually buried me in a shallow grave, thinking that I was dead.

In addition to being forced to fight, my friends and I were distributed to rebel commanders. We were forced to kill those girls who tried to escape or refused their husbands. I was repeatedly raped by the LRA commander on countless occasions. I was an innocent young girl. I had never known a man in my life until that day. I felt like a rock was being thrust into my skin. Yet I had to survive.

In April 1997, after seven months in captivity, I finally got a chance to escape from the rebels. The LRA was attacked by the rebels from southern Sudan, giving me the chance to run away. I walked for two weeks without food, surviving only on wild leaves, soil and dew in the morning. I was rescued by villagers from southern Sudan and handed back to the Ugandan Government soldiers who then handed me over to Sister Rachele. I was happy to be back, but my heart was saddened by the ongoing torture my friends were still going through. I left too many of them behind.

After a month at home, I went back to St. Mary's College Aboke and later graduated. I was lucky to reach the university level. But many of the girls who manage to escape are not able to return to school or have their dreams for the future because they are not helped to deal with their horrible experiences, or because they now have babies born during their captivity.

I have told my story, but the stories you have not heard are thousand-fold. There are dozens of armies and rebel groups that continue to recruit children in the same way around the world. I am here to remind you of the very real suffering of these children, who are hoping for you to act.

When I read the report in front of us (S/2009/158), I was amazed with the progress made in stopping girls and boys from being forcibly taken from their homes, beaten and forced to kill. Although child soldiers are still around, many have already been released. However, when I read further in the report, I saw little on a subject that means so much to me. What has been done for those boys and girls who are victims of rape? Sexual violence is a terrible crime and perpetrators must be punished. It must stop. I am saying this out of experience.

I was lucky enough to be able to escape and to be supported by people who cared for me, like Sister Rachele. But so many girls are still waiting for their chance to be rescued, and I think of them every day of my life.

I heard the Special Representative when she asked what she should say to victims of sexual violence like Adila and me. My answer is very simple: there is hope. There is hope because I too believe that this Council will act and succeed, as it has for child soldiers, for those thousands of children out there who are still waiting. I say this myself, because I am still waiting for some of my friends to return, and I hope that everyone here will be committed to bringing people like my friends back home.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Grace Akallo for her presence here today and her courage in coming to share her painful experience with us. I also wish to congratulate her for her strength and her will to move forward. I have no doubt that Ms. Akallo's testimony should demonstrate to us the urgency with which the international community should continue to act on this issue. Thank you very much, Grace. We all wish you the very best in the future.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to

deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

**Mr. Vilović** (Croatia): Before beginning my presentation I too would like personally to thank Grace Akallo for being with us today and sharing her touching story. I assure her that her moving words and her personal history will further guide us in our deliberations.

At the outset, allow me to thank the Security Council presidency, the delegation of Mexico, for organizing this open debate. Croatia welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/158) and commends the important work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and of the many non-governmental organizations working in the field. Their contribution is of tremendous importance, since it gives voice to the individual children who are or will become victims of these grave violations.

As a member of the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Croatia has had the opportunity to witness the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. The mechanism requires the Council to react to situations where recruitment and use of children take place. By listing in the annexes of his reports parties to armed conflict that recruit and use children, the Secretary-General gives the Security Council and its Working Group an opportunity to use a variety of tools in response to those violations.

However, this mechanism is triggered only if the recruitment and use of child soldiers occurs. In other words, if parties to a conflict commit one of the five grave violations against children other than the recruitment or use of children, they will not be listed in the report and the Security Council will not have the opportunity to act. In practice, that means that the Security Council will not request anything from those parties in a conflict area where children are being raped, where schools and hospitals are being attacked, where children are being deliberately killed or maimed and where the abduction of children is ongoing.

Croatia therefore welcomes the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the Security Council expand the criteria for the annexes of his reports to include parties that commit rape and other grave sexual violence against children in armed conflict, without prejudice to the possibility of further expanding the criteria in the future to include other violations.

An atmosphere of impunity and lack of accountability will allow perpetrators to continue hurting children in various ways. Without any real repercussions or the threat of targeted measures from the Security Council, perpetrators have no reason to stop their acts.

Croatia understands that all grave violations need equal attention in the Council. We would, however, like to emphasize that children in situations of armed conflict are particularly vulnerable, and that intentional acts of rape and sexual violence carry with them long-term repercussions both for the individual children and for the societies they live in. Croatia is appalled by the fact that children represent one third of those brutalized by rape. Croatia is also deeply concerned about UNESCO's finding that the number of attacks on schools, students and teachers increased sixfold between 2003 and 2006. These deliberate acts, together with many reported incidents involving the throwing of acid on girl's faces, aim to strip children of their education, leaving them even more vulnerable to future violations.

We are alarmed about the numerous incidents where humanitarian workers have been killed, abducted, beaten or threatened. Such acts, as well as the looting of aid convoys, deny children life-saving humanitarian assistance and must be stopped.

In order to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict, the Security Council can show its commitment through the possible adoption of a new resolution on children and armed conflict. This new resolution could give the Council an opportunity to expand the trigger of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to include rape and other grave sexual violence against children. It could also authorize relevant United Nations personnel to enter into a dialogue with armed forces and groups in order to verify the implementation of time-bound action plans and could request the Secretary-General to include information on the implementation of all requests made in the conclusions of the Security Council Working Group.

Moreover, Croatia believes that the Security Council should consider referring individual cases of grave violations against children in armed conflict to

the International Criminal Court, especially where national systems fail to address these cases.

Finally, allow me to express our gratitude to all stakeholders who have been working on the protection of children. Only by combining our efforts can we hope to reach the common goal of a world where children are neither victims nor targets in armed conflict.

**Mr. Churkin** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the initiative of our Mexican colleagues to convene today's meeting of the Security Council on this very important item. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2009/158). We wish too to thank Ms. Coomaraswamy, Mr. Le Roy and Ms. Veneman for the timely information they provided. We listened with close attention to the heart-rending statement made by Ms. Grace Akallo.

Russia endorses the Secretary-General's appeal to that proper attention be accorded to all grave violations of the rights of children in conflict. Crimes against children should not go unpunished. Here, we welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation that the criteria for the inclusion of parties to armed conflict in the annexes of his reports be expanded to include the killing or maiming of children.

We resolutely condemn intentional attacks on civilians, including children, and the deadly, indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force. One example of action of that kind was the August 2008 attack by the Georgian military against South Ossetia. The killing of civilians, including children, and the destruction of schools and hospitals have been recorded in reports of the Secretary-General.

Nor can we pass over in silence the grave violations of international humanitarian law during the military operations that Israel carried out in Gaza in January; these claimed the lives of hundreds of children and reduced schools — including a school operated by the United Nations — to rubble.

Once again, we call upon parties to conflict to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and to refrain from the use of force against the civilian population.

Children continue to fall victim to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, where armed groups attack the peaceful population and engage in terrorist acts. It is important that Al-Qaida in Iraq has finally been included, alongside the Taliban, among the violators listed in annex I of the current report of the Secretary-General. Regrettably, children in those countries also lose their lives as a result of the actions of foreign forces, whose mission is to protect them. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has provided telling statistics in that regard. Despite repeated assurances about additional measures continuing to be taken to prevent such incidents, these occur with tragic regularity. This threatens the peace processes in those countries.

We consider that attempts to refer to civilian deaths as "collateral damage" are unacceptable and inconsistent with, inter alia, the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. We advocate the thorough investigation of such incidents and the punishment of those responsible.

We are pleased that monitoring and reporting mechanisms have been set up in all situations within the purview of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It is now necessary to ensure that those mechanisms submit timely, objective, accurate and reliable information, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). We also favour the inclusion in peacekeeping operations of child protection advisers.

We take note of the work by United Nations country teams in urging parties to conflict to adopt plans of action to demobilize child soldiers and to end their recruitment. In that connection, we stress that contacts between the United Nations mechanism and non-State armed groups can be established only with the consent of the Governments of affected States. Moreover, although they are an important instrument for the protection of children, plans of action should not be ends in themselves. The genuine improvement of the situation of children on the ground is far more important to the assessment of progress than promises that are made on paper but often not fulfilled.

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by France and then by Mexico, has done a great deal to elaborate recommendations on specific situations. The effective implementation of those recommendations will require the development of constructive cooperation with interested States.

The rehabilitation of child victims and their reintegration into society require concrete, long-term

steps, including the establishment of conditions to ensure their access to full education and health care. There is also a need to take steps to prevent crimes against minors. In that respect, in many conflict and post-conflict situations the decisive factor can be effective international support for national efforts to protect children's' rights.

**Mr. Ripert** (France) (*spoke in French*): France fully endorses the statement to be made later today by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

At the outset, allow me to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico for her initiative to bring us together here today to address the issue of children and armed conflict. I also wish to thank Mr. Alain Le Roy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Secretary-General for their statements. I further thank Ms. Grace Akallo for her particularly moving testimony, which reminds us of the gravity of the crimes that we must end.

I also wish to pay tribute to the commitment of Mr. Claude Heller, Permanent Representative of Mexico, in assuming the duties of Chairman of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict with conviction and resolve.

Over the past four years ago, the Working Group has focused on the recruitment and use of child soldiers and has contributed to the release of tens of thousands of children. That was made possible by the unflagging efforts of all the members of the Security Council; the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy; UNICEF at the highest levels; and other actors in the field, particularly the non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Much remains to be done, however, as we are reminded each day by the tragic situation of children affected by conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Sudan and Sri Lanka. We must respond. If the parties to a conflict do not implement action plans to free children despite repeated calls from the Security Council, we must not hesitate to impose tough, targeted sanctions. There is, unfortunately, no effective prevention or deterrent without sanctions. In this regard, I particularly welcome the actions taken by the International Criminal Court and the international criminal justice system, which have proven their ability to prosecute those who are guilty of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. Now more than ever, the fight against impunity must be a priority.

We do not put legitimate Governments and armed groups on the same footing, but they have the same responsibilities with respect to the Paris Principles. Children — all children — must be freed from the scourge of war. It is not just the protection and sometimes even the survival of children that are at stake, but the credibility of the Security Council and its resolutions.

France is convinced of the need for substantial progress with regard to the other five grave violations of children's rights that have been referred to the Security Council. We fully agree with the analysis and recommendations presented by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2009/158). The widespread nature of sexual crimes against children and the massive, systematic and planned nature of these crimes in certain situations call for decisive reaction. Children are too often killed or maimed during deliberate attacks, including terrorist attacks aimed at schoolchildren. We must do everything we can to halt these vile acts and to ensure that their perpetrators are held accountable before the courts. I welcome the adoption later today of a presidential statement that sends a strong signal to the parties in that regard.

> As Bernard Kouchner said here last year,
>
> "the time has come to reflect together on the possibility of permitting the Working Group to deal with the tragedy of sexual violence, independently of whether or not there are child soldiers in the country concerned" (*S/PV.5834, p. 23*).

Expanding the criteria for adding parties to the "list of infamies" to include sexual violence and intentional killing and maiming would represent an important first step. The Security Council will today commit itself to act within three months. We must ensure that this decision is followed up in deed, which would require, in particular, triggering the establishment of a reporting and monitoring mechanism.

Given France's experience at the head of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, I would like to share three proposals that we believe would make the Working Group more proactive, more transparent and more effective.

The Working Group's conclusions should be followed up more effectively, first, by the Working Group itself, which should make greater use of the information regularly provided to it by the Secretariat and by NGOs; then by the Security Council and its sanctions committees when examining situations on their agenda; and finally, in partnership with the donors to ensure in particular that the children released by armed groups and all other child victims of abuse receive appropriate care and are placed in reintegration programmes. Informal donor meetings could be organized to that end.

The Paris Conference review forum, "Free Children from War," inaugurated last September by the French Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights, could provide a framework for these meetings. The Mine Action Support Group's experience could provide a frame of reference in terms of methodology. France decided last year, at the first meeting of the forum, to make a special contribution of more than €1 million to UNICEF's reintegration and social rehabilitation programmes. We hope that other countries will be able to do the same, for instance at the next high-level meeting of the follow-up forum on the Paris Commitments that we will organize in the fall in the context of the coming session of the General Assembly here in New York.

The responsiveness of the Working Group could be improved. The Working Group has demonstrated its ability to adopt conclusions on all the reports that have been submitted to it. However, to date it has been unable able to find the resources to react formally to the sometimes troubling information that it may receive from the field between the submission of the Secretary-General's reports. We feel it to be crucial for the Working Group to react more quickly to emergencies, for instance by allowing the Chairman to react publicly on behalf of the Working Group.

The Working Group's work must be more transparent. The Group's formal meetings, based on the Council's formal meetings, would benefit from being held in public so that the many States concerned by the issue of children in armed conflict can be better informed and thereby in a position to participate in the international community's critical exertion of pressure on recalcitrant countries and groups. Using new information technologies, such as Internet broadcasting, could also be tried so that stakeholders in the field can also benefit from, contribute to and even participate in our debates.

If it is to implement these measures and achieve these objectives, the Secretariat must provide better support. The burden for this is currently falling solely on the Working Group's Chairman. We believe that increasing the Group's workload must lead to an allocation of sufficient resources.

At a time when there are believed to be 200,000 child soldiers in the world, the international community cannot turn its attention from this tragedy or waver in its efforts to demobilize and reintegrate them into society. In this regard, the guidelines of French policy remain unchanged. They are set out in the full text of my remarks, which will be distributed. We are translating those principles into action, as attested by the creation of two attaché positions specializing in the issue of children in armed conflict at our diplomatic missions in the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, each with its own budget and regional jurisdiction and working closely with the authorities of the countries concerned, United Nations partners, local and international non-governmental organizations and other donors. Consequently we were able to respond swiftly, in partnership with UNICEF, when about one hundred children were released in Burundi a few weeks ago. We are also able to implement programmes in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo that fully integrate best practices defined by the Paris Principles.

In conclusion, I wish to assure the Council of France's determined support for Mexico's efforts as chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Despite the complex procedure, despite the long period of development, we must remain animated by a sense of urgency. The fate of tens of thousands of children depends on that. They are counting on us to make concrete gestures. Grace Akallo has just told us of her hope and her confidence in us, in our ability to act. I am certain that we will hear her call and that we will all assume our full responsibilities.

**Ms. Rice** (United States of America): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, and Foreign Minister Espinosa for your leadership in hosting today's very important debate. I want to begin by also thanking the Foreign Minister for her very timely comments on Mexico's handling of the swine flu crisis. Here in the

United States our hearts are with the people of Mexico in this time of trial, and we very much applaud Mexico's efforts to confront and contain the crisis. My Government stands hand in hand with our friend and neighbour, Mexico, as we work together to deal with what is a shared challenge, one that is affecting both our countries and, indeed, many other parts of the world.

I also wish to welcome Mexico as the new chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and to thank France for its leadership as chair of that group over the last several years.

I also wish to thank Special Representative Coomaraswamy for her briefing and for her steadfast advocacy on behalf of the world's children. She continues to have our fullest support. I wish to say also how moved I know we all were by the testimony of young Grace Akallo, whose story and experience remind us of our obligations and of the importance of what we are discussing here today.

The United States is deeply committed to the welfare of children, and that includes protecting children from the scourge of war. Every day hundreds of thousands of children find themselves caught in the clutches of armed conflict, unprotected, exploited, abused, raped and terribly vulnerable. The Security Council and its Working Group have telegraphed strong political will to help those children and have helped shine the international spotlight on their suffering. Therefore the United States welcomes the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/158). It includes valuable monitoring and reporting information that highlights both real progress and ongoing tragedies. It outlines thoughtful recommendations for future action.

Before turning to the rest of the report, allow me to comment on a few specific situations.

There is good news from Uganda. As the report notes, we have no evidence at present that the Uganda People's Defence Force has recruited child soldiers since August 2007. Uganda's strictly enforced laws and regulations now prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We commend the Government of Uganda for its efforts and for signing an action plan last December. We urge other Governments and non-State actors to follow Uganda's example by developing, signing and implementing action plans of their own.

However, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation remains dire. During the reporting period, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) documented 554 new cases of children recruited by armed groups, 26 of them girls. We are also deeply troubled by what the Secretary-General's report calls "widespread sexual violence" by armed groups in that country. In particular, two foreign armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic — the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda and the Lord's Resistance Army — continue to abduct children to serve as soldiers, porters and sex slaves, and some of those innocents have been murdered in cold blood.

We are also deeply concerned by the situation in Sri Lanka, where fighting between Government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has led to a growing, and grave, humanitarian crisis. Unconfirmed reports that the Government continues heavy shelling in the conflict zone, causing large numbers of civilian casualties, are alarming indeed. The LTTE has reportedly increased its forcible recruitment of children, and the Tigers are said to threaten families who seek to disclose information about their children to the United Nations. The LTTE also uses civilians as human shields, putting children at even greater risk.

Both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE must abide by their commitments to prevent further loss of civilian life. We remain frustrated and concerned that the Government of Sri Lanka has not yet allowed a United Nations humanitarian team into the conflict zone to facilitate relief operations and the safe evacuation of civilians, including children.

We also continue to be deeply troubled by events in the Sudan, where close to five hundred children, some as young as 12, have been recruited since February 2008 by a range of armed groups, including Government forces. Moreover, attacks and restrictions on humanitarian workers have hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid to children. The recent expulsion by the Government of the Sudan of 13 international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has put the children of Darfur and the three areas at ever more grave risk. My Government is also extremely concerned by the 53 verified cases of child rape by armed Government elements in Darfur — something that I hope we can all agree is utterly unacceptable.

The situations in the Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere remind us how much more remains to be done. One worthwhile step would be to expand the list of triggers for the monitoring and reporting mechanism authorized by Council resolution 1612 (2005) to include rape and sexual violence against children, as well as killing and maiming. As the Secretary-General's report shows, the rate of such crimes against children in combat zones has increased alarmingly. The United States fully supports such an expansion of these triggers. We applaud the Security Council for its coming endorsement of today's presidential statement pointing towards the same goal, and we look forward to the Council's further action on this matter.

Finally, the Secretary-General's report reminds us that some Governments and militias are repeat offenders — entities that persist in illegally recruiting and using child soldiers in defiance of the will of the international community. Where armies and militias that depend on children to fill their ranks do not change their ways, this Council has the authority and the responsibility to consider taking appropriate measures. The United States is determined to do its part. Our support for international organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross helps meet the needs of refugees, children and others whose lives have been uprooted by conflict, including the youngest victims of war. We are also working with our NGO partners to provide education and other programmes to meet the needs of children and adolescents in conflict zones and to give them hope for a better future.

The Security Council and the international community have made noteworthy progress together, but we must not stop now. We share the responsibility to protect all of the world's children and to provide them with a future of promise and opportunity, not one of war and abuse. We have heard the moving stories of such former child soldiers as young Grace, who was here today, Ishmael Beah and Emmanuel Jal. Let their escapes from terror and despair become the rule for children in armed conflict, not remarkable exceptions. Let their survival and success motivate us all and spur us to do more.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Ambassador of the United States for her words on the issue of the swine flu epidemic. I would also like to express my gratitude for her Government's cooperation, very open approach, close cooperation and support in jointly facing that common challenge.

**Mr. La Yifan** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to welcome you to New York, Madam President, to preside over this open debate on the issue of children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Deputy Secretary-General Migiro, Special Representative Coomaraswamy, Under-Secretary-General Le Roy and Executive Director Veneman of UNICEF for their briefings. I should also like to thank former victim and child soldier Grace Akallo for her moving statement.

The Security Council has defined six grave violations against children by parties to armed conflict: the recruitment and use of children in violation of international law, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access to children. All six violations against children should be accorded equal attention by the Security Council. We support the various endeavours of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to promote the protection of children in armed conflict. In that regard, I would like to stress the following points.

First, it is the common task of all the relevant organs of the United Nations to protect children in armed conflict and to ensure that they return to normal lives in the aftermath of conflict. Therefore, an integrated approach and a joint response are needed from the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and other relevant entities. As far as the Security Council is concerned, it should work from the perspective of conflict settlement to protect children from the harm of armed conflict by focusing on conflict prevention and the elimination of the root causes of armed conflict. In recent years, the escalation of tension in some conflict areas has subjected local children to severe hardship, whereas positive progress in peace processes in other areas has brought hope for the future of local children. That shows that the Security Council should concentrate more on conflicts themselves and focus its efforts on conflict prevention.

Secondly, in protecting children in armed conflict, it is necessary to respect the Governments of the countries concerned and encourage them to play a

major role. Resolution 1612 (2005) stresses that the Government of the country concerned bears the primary responsibility for protecting its own children. In carrying out their work in protecting children, parties concerned should cooperate fully with the Governments of the countries concerned in a joint effort to keep children from the harm of armed conflict. The Security Council and its Working Group should maintain frequent communication with the Governments of the countries concerned, acknowledge and support the positive measures they have adopted and continuously strengthen mutual trust with them.

Thirdly, the Security Council should continue to work to improve the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The monitoring and reporting mechanism has now been established in all the countries listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/158). Since the main task of that mechanism is to collect information, it is necessary, in its operation, to enhance communication and cooperation with the Governments of the countries concerned. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has done a great deal of work since its inception, which is a source of satisfaction to us. We hope that the Working Group will strengthen cooperation with the Governments of the countries concerned, address the relevant issues through consultations and submit practical and viable recommendations to the Security Council. The Working Group is heavily burdened with a huge workload. We therefore hope that it will set clear priorities and improve its efficiency.

Efforts by the Security Council alone are far from sufficient to address the question of children and armed conflict. We welcome a more important role for regional organizations in dealing with this question. In addition, we encourage international institutions such as UNICEF and the World Bank to play a greater role in helping the countries concerned to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict. We also welcome greater contributions from non-governmental organizations.

China is concerned about the long-term effect of armed conflict on children and deems it necessary to take long-term measures to help children affected by armed conflict to reintegrate into society and resume normal lives. In post-conflict reconstruction, the international community should make the return of children to homes, schools and society a priority and provide adequate financial guarantees for that purpose.

China attaches great importance to the protection of the rights and interests of children. Having ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, it has become a State party to the Protocol. We call on countries that have not yet done so to join and ratify the Protocol. It is our hope that, through our common efforts, the situation of children in armed conflict can be effectively improved and that all children can look towards a better tomorrow.

**Mr. Shalgham** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude to you, Madam President, for being here today to preside personally over this important debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, as well as to commend Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their efforts to protect children, both in situations of armed conflict and elsewhere.

The report (S/2009/158) of the Secretary-General before us focuses on the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) and its monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as on the recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict in a number of countries. However, there is still much that the international community must do to implement that resolution.

We would like to emphasize that the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict are still taking place. Children are forced to participate in combat and the killing of people. They are often more subjected to abduction and sexual violence.

Libya expresses its concern and condemnation of the crimes committed against children involved in armed conflict. In that regard, we support the appeal of the Secretary-General to Member States to take stringent measures, within the framework of their national legislation and in accordance with international humanitarian law, to hold the perpetrators of those crimes accountable and to impose the harshest penalties in order to eliminate impunity. By the same token, Libya shares the view that the protection of children in armed conflict should be considered an

important facet of the strategy to prevent and resolve armed conflict.

Children continue to be the main victims of grave violations of human rights in conflicts throughout the world. The report of the Secretary-General bears sad testimony to that fact. My delegation shares the view of the Secretary-General that the detention of children in various conflict areas, based on their alleged association with armed groups, constitutes an express violation of human rights standards.

In particular, my delegation wishes to focus on the abuse, torture and coercive interrogation of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons. Here, we would like to strongly condemn the Israeli military operations that have recently led to the killing and displacement of thousands of Palestinian children, caused by the demolition of their homes and the killing of their families. In addition, thousands of children suffer daily while going to school because of the racist separation wall erected on Palestinian land and the hundreds of checkpoints that separate Palestinian villages. The unique nature, duration and extent of their suffering, as well as its continuation, constitute an established policy pursued by the occupier, and affect tens of thousands of children. These practices and policies should be prosecuted.

The actions undertaken by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in attempting to protect children and remove them from hotbeds of tension and conflict deserve our appreciation. However, my delegation appeals to the Working Group to avoid selectivity and double standards in the course of formulating its recommendations and its actions as those should not be politicized.

Given the regional dimension of some conflicts, my country appreciates the recommendation of the Secretary-General that United Nations country teams, political missions and peacekeeping missions allocate necessary resources to mechanisms for information exchange and cooperation on cross-border child protection concerns such as recruitment, release and reintegration of children.

The state of abject poverty and degradation of an area, the widening of an area of conflict, the absence of development, the inability to obtain basic services and lack of social and economic opportunity are all factors that increase the risk of child recruitment and underline the necessity of far-reaching development and recovery programmes aligned with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration guidelines and programmes. Such programmes must be based on the needs of local civil society with a view to achieving the successful and sustainable reintegration of former child soldiers into society.

Libya calls on international institutions and donors to help implement those programmes and hopes that the appeal launched by the Secretary-General will receive a positive response from the international community, including the World Bank and other influential actors. They must set aside long-term resources for use by United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, national organizations and civil society to promote child protection activities.

It must not be forgotten that the best way to protect children in armed conflict is to prevent the outbreak of such conflicts by addressing the motivations and root causes of conflicts.

**Mr. Guillermet** (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico for her presence among us today and for convening this important debate. My country highly values the work of the Mexican delegation in the presidency of the Security Council and Mexico's leadership of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We also thank Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, and Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations for their presentations. In particular, my delegation thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her presentation of the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2009/158) and for her recommendations for making the efforts of the Working Group more effective and efficient.

We have also heard the harrowing testimony of Grace Akallo. Her words should spur us on to work to protect girls and boys around the world.

The creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the establishment of the Working Group have focused the attention of the Council and of the Organization in general on the plight of children in situations of armed conflict, an issue that has become prominent in our discussions and concrete analysis of specific situations.

The use of new tools has already brought very positive progress to the fight against the recruitment of children. Throughout the world, parties to conflicts have reached agreements to halt the recruitment of children and secured the demobilization and reintegration of child recruits subject to abuses and violations of their rights. Nevertheless and in spite of those achievements, we still face major challenges in addressing the issues that affect children in conflicts.

The limited number of situations where plans of action have been implemented, according to the report of the Secretary-General, is a major concern for Costa Rica, as is the limited scope of the existing mechanisms that deal mainly with the recruitment of children and relegate other grave violations to secondary consideration. We firmly affirm that the lack of systematic follow-up of the recommendations of the Working Group has limited the potential scope and efficiency of the Working Group.

Costa Rica believes that now is the ideal moment to take stock of the Group's work and to review, update and strengthen the framework established in Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), particularly in the following areas.

First, the number of violations that may trigger the monitoring and reporting mechanism must be expanded. On that issue, my delegation considers that all six grave violations established in resolution 1612 (2005) are equally grave and we believe that they must all receive due and balanced consideration on the part of the Working Group. Costa Rica does not believe it appropriate to establish artificial hierarchies, as has been done up to now, subordinating the triggering of the monitoring and reporting mechanism only to the recruitment of children. In our opinion, such narrow and outdated criteria put other violations in the background when there is an absence of recruitment, and they become neglected.

Costa Rica would support the implementation of a progressive approach that would trigger the monitoring and reporting mechanism on the basis of two additional grave violations: the killing and maiming of children and sexual violence. It is clear that to ensure the viability of this approach it is necessary, on the basis of international law, to clearly define the limits of each grave violation, set forth jurisdiction and identify the most effective response by the various United Nations organs. My delegation welcomes the Council's intention to take action in response to this concern within the next three months.

The second area of importance for Costa Rica is that of the action plans. For us, it appears necessary to carefully review the factors that have limited their application until now. It is also necessary to determine how timely and appropriate it is to use this tool to respond to other grave violations.

My country considers that these plans must include a component for dealing in a comprehensive and sustained way with victims of violations, including access to basic services in key areas such as education and health, with a gender-sensitive approach and special attention to particularly vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities. This response calls for the imperative participation of various United Nations agencies and is key in preventing other violations.

Thirdly, my delegation considers it indispensable to follow up more systematically on the recommendations of the Working Group, which must serve as true indicators of progress in successive assessments of each situation. This follow-up of the Working Group's recommendations should also be accompanied by measures and sanctions, as other delegations have affirmed this morning, to make them effective when necessary. In this respect, we agree with the report's recommendation that cases be referred to the Security Council sanctions committees as a means of deterrence. Moreover, we believe that the use of complementary mechanisms to support national judiciary institutions, such as the International Criminal Court can also be a valuable tool in the fight against impunity.

Finally, we deem it necessary that each report include an assessment of the progress or deterioration of each specific situation. These assessments would bring a measure of accountability, both to those who commit grave violations against children and to those of us who are responsible for making the perpetrators accountable. We encourage the Office of the Special Representative to ensure that its reports go beyond the compilation of statistical information and help to identify with greater clarity trends and patterns of violations, as well as to promote a strategic vision to find solutions to each one of them.

**Mr. Takasu** (Japan): I would like to express my deep appreciation for Mexico's leadership in organizing this important debate. Our appreciation

goes also to the former and current Chairs of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Ripert of France and you yourself, Mr. President, for bringing this issue to the forefront of the international agenda. Japan is committed to extending its utmost support to the valuable work of the Working Group.

I would also like to express gratitude to the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, Special Representative, Coomaraswamy, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and the UNICEF Executive Director for their presence here this morning and for their vital contributions to the protection of children. We particularly thank Ms. Grace Akallo for sharing with us her painful but inspiring life experience and her advocacy activities.

In recent years, we witnessed a marked improvement in the condition of children in some countries, as several conflicts have come to an end. We are encouraged that noticeable progress has been made through action plans to release child soldiers in several countries, including Burundi, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

At the same time, many other parties to conflict have still not implemented action plans. Indeed, 19 parties have been listed for the past four consecutive years in the annexes to the reports of the Secretary-General on this subject. Japan is deeply concerned about those vulnerable children, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the situation is still serious, and also in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

We appreciate the contribution of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, but its work is not complete when it reaches conclusions. In the coming weeks, it should focus more on following up on and implementing its conclusions effectively. The Security Council should mobilize all means available to us to combat violations against children and send a strong political signal, including peacekeeping operations, special political missions, integrated offices, the Peacebuilding Commission, and the sanctions committees.

The Security Council should also respond to other grave violations against children in armed conflict, such as sexual violence. Systematic rape as a tactic of war is impermissible. The Council should react firmly and forcefully against any sexual violence in conflict. It should strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Japan supports the recommendation of the Secretary-General to include parties that commit rape and other grave sexual violence against children in the annexes of his reports in the future. We believe that expansion of the criteria could enhance the capacity of agencies on the ground, such as UNICEF, to carry out monitoring and reporting.

Another serious threat posed to many children comes from landmines, unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions. Some 5,500 people were killed or maimed by landmines and unexploded ordnance in 2007, and children account for more than one third of all victims. We welcome the steady progress of the Ottawa Convention, which has now marked the tenth anniversary of its entry into force. The recent signing conference for the Convention on Cluster Munitions was also welcome.

It is imperative to prevent the deaths of innocent civilians and children and to provide support to victims. For this reason, we have contributed more than $300 million, including for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, the Sudan, Afghanistan and Lebanon. We will continue to make similar contributions.

Small arms and light weapons have the most serious impact on the situation of child soldiers and on violence against children, including recruitment and abuse. Since small arms and light weapons frequently circulate through illicit trade, we should encourage every country to strengthen its implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Japan has been actively supporting projects related to the control of small arms in conflict, such as the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) in Afghanistan and the Small Arms Control Programme of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

However, a more fundamental solution would be to restrict the export of weapons to countries engaged in armed conflict or where armed conflict is likely to arise. Japan's long-standing policy of prohibiting the export of weapons imposes strict criteria for the transfer of arms to any country. Based on this policy, we support the establishment of a common

international standard in order to ensure the responsible transfer of conventional arms, and we actively participate in relevant discussions within the United Nations on this issue.

In conclusion, in many conflict situations, children are the most vulnerable. Japan is a strong advocate of the concept of human security. We are very proud that, together with Mexico, we are promoting the Friends of Human Security at the United Nations. We work with interested partners to achieve the goals of protecting and empowering vulnerable people on a regional and local level, including through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security. By preventing and alleviating the deleterious impacts of conflict, we endeavour to enable children around the world to have a brighter future.

**Mr. Mayr-Harting** (Austria): Madame President, I would first like to thank you for your presence here today and for your personal commitment to the issues that we are dealing with. I should also like to express my sympathy and solidarity in regard to the epidemic that your country is currently experiencing, an epidemic that has, in the meantime, spread to other countries, including to European countries such as my own.

We are grateful to you, Madame President, for the determination that you have shown in this matter today, and you can certainly count on our full cooperation in this issue. I would like to thank Mexico and the Permanent Representative of Mexico here in New York for the excellent work that has been done in the preparation of this meeting and in the Working Group that deals with this matter.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Coomaraswamy, Executive Director Veneman and Under-Secretary-General Le Roy for their statements. In particular, as others have, we also welcome the presence of Ms. Grace Akallo and thank her for her thought-provoking and moving remarks. It is very important to us that the Council listen to the voices of the victims of the very crimes that we strive to prevent. I can assure Ms. Akallo that we will learn from her thoughts and experiences and that they will carry us forward in our work.

The new report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/158) provides an excellent overview and assessment of the developments that have taken place since late 2007. We appreciate the ongoing implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in new country situations. The signing of two additional formal action plans and the de-listing of one party are welcome developments.

Nevertheless, the Secretary-General's report makes it very clear that less than 10 per cent of all parties listed in the annexes have entered into formal action plans. The vast majority of those parties are non-State actors. We agree with the Secretary-General that direct contact between the United Nations country teams and non-State actors is of great importance to ensure the effective protection of children and we call on the concerned Member States to allow such contact in the framework of resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

According to the report, 19 parties to conflicts have been listed in the annexes for the past four years. We believe that, for the sake of the children, the Council must ensure respect for its resolutions and should make better use of the tools available to it. More systematic communication needs to be established between the Security Council Working Group and the relevant sanctions committees. We welcome the fact that this idea is reflected in the draft presidential statement that will be adopted at the end of this debate. We also wish to encourage Member States to provide sanctions committees with additional information with a view to listing individuals or entities committing violations and abuses against children.

More has to be done, too, to end impunity and to bring to justice individuals who commit crimes against children. Concerned Member States must take decisive action to strengthen the rule of law and must ensure that those responsible are brought to justice either through national justice systems or international justice mechanisms. The International Criminal Court — and I wish to stress this point — can play an important role in ending impunity in this area also.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that provisions for the protection of children continue to be included in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions. The protection of children must also be systematically

considered in peace agreements. We recognize the important work done by child protection advisers and welcome their increasing deployment over the past few years. Austria was honoured to support the ongoing efforts within the United Nations system to develop guidance for mainstreaming the protection of children within United Nations peacekeeping by hosting a child protection workshop organized by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at the European University Center for Peace Studies of Stadtschlaining, Austria, in March 2009. The workshop brought together — for the first time, as far as I know — child protection advisers from all United Nations peace operations and peacebuilding support offices.

We particularly welcome the special focus in the Secretary-General's report on the issue of rape and sexual violence against children. They are horrendous crimes that have far-reaching implications for the development of the affected societies. Unlike the other six grave violations, those crimes have no obvious link to warfare, and yet sexual and gender-based violence against children has reached appalling levels in many situations of conflict.

It will be difficult to ensure the effectiveness and credibility of our work if the recruitment and use of child soldiers remain the only gateway to listing parties to armed conflict in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports. We therefore support the Secretary-General's recommendation to add the crime of rape and grave sexual violence as an additional element to trigger the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We are also open to including the crime of killing and maiming of children in violation of applicable international law.

Also, we welcome and encourage the ongoing efforts within the United Nations to devise a strategy to improve data collection and reporting on sexual violence. We must ensure an effective response to these violations. We also believe that the special situation of children with disabilities should be given thought. We fully support the view that resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1820 (2008) should be mutually reinforcing and that complementary processes for the documentation of and/or reporting on those resolutions should be explored. The participation of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and other relevant actors in United Nations country task forces is a positive step.

It is significant that we have achieved some progress, important progress, during the negotiations in the past days, but we regret that the Council was not yet ready to take action on these pressing concerns. We have noted that the members of the Security Council are prepared to and will continue their considerations on this very important matter. You can rest assured, Madame President, that Austria remains committed to a more effective and efficient framework for the protection of children. We will continue to work with others in order to allow for a more balanced and credible response to the very real issues that children are confronted with on the ground.

**Mr. Tiendrébéogo** (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you personally, Madame President, and the Mexican delegation — the new Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict — for having organized this open debate on such an important issue as the protection of children in armed conflict.

We note the presence this morning of the Secretary-General and thank him for his important remarks. We convey our gratitude to Ms. Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for the presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/158) and her personal commitment to this cause. We also thank Ms. Veneman, Mr. Le Roy for their statements, and we thank Ms. Akallo in particular for having conveyed to us how difficult it is to be a child soldier and for her vivid plea, which I am sure the Council will have noted.

Although notable progress can be seen in the protection of children in areas of armed conflict, the situation remains troubling. As the news shows us, the violation of children's rights continues in different forms, all equally serious, regardless of existing standards on the issue. Recruitment and use of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, murder and mutilation, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions and the impeding of humanitarian access are part of their daily lot.

The recruitment and use of children by both State and non-State actors continue in violation of resolution 1612 (2005) and of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In some regions, their scale, in particular the cross-border

recruitment of child soldiers, including in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees, is especially alarming.

With regard to sexual violence, it is traumatic and has destructive psychological effects both on victims and on their communities. Unfortunately, socio-cultural inertia is still an obstacle to their elimination, to prosecution of their perpetrators and, above all, to adequate legal, medical and psychological care for the victims.

Systematical and deliberate attacks against pupils, teachers and schools are equally unacceptable. Even in times of conflict, education must continue, and the parties must shoulder their responsibilities in that regard, in accordance with international law.

We are also particularly concerned by the obstacles to humanitarian access. It is essential that the Council ensure strict compliance with international humanitarian law, all the more because the current nature of conflicts makes civilians, including children, who are the most vulnerable group, the main victims of combat.

Protecting children in armed conflict is a shared and multifaceted responsibility requiring concerted, coordinated and renewed effort. We urge the Security Council to take the necessary deterrent measures against those who violate children's rights in situations of armed conflict by adopting a comprehensive strategy for preventing conflicts and adequately protecting all children.

There is also a need to end the impunity prevailing at the national level. That is why my delegation also advocates genuine independence on the part of judicial systems.

The implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism has produced encouraging results. Given the damaging effects of other grave violations, the mechanism should be extended. Until a new relevant resolution is adopted, resolution 1612 (2005) should continue to be a guidepost for our actions.

The formulation of action plans by a number of State and non-State actors to put an end to all recruitment of child soldiers has also proved useful. Therefore, my delegation urges all parties, in particular those listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report, to draft clear action plans containing precise deadlines.

We welcome the initiative to ensure the presence of child protection advisers in peacekeeping operations and political missions. Once again, we urge the Council to provide a concise and precise child protection mandate to peacekeeping operations.

Peace agreements; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes; and reconstruction activities should incorporate the protection of children, including girl combatants or girls associated with armed groups; the development of basic social services for them; and professional training for former child soldiers.

My delegation congratulates the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on its leadership. We urge it to improve its working methods and decision-making procedures. We also believe that the current increase in its workload should receive appropriate administrative support. Furthermore, the Council should develop a system for regular follow-up on the Working Group's conclusions and recommendations. The establishment of more fruitful cooperation between the Working Group and the geographical sanctions committees should also be incorporated into that process.

The primary responsibility for protecting populations in conflict areas lies with the parties. We urge them to fully shoulder that responsibility, in particular with regard to vulnerable groups such as children.

In conclusion, we should like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team, as well as UNICEF, for their leadership on issues related to children and armed conflict. We are also grateful to other United Nations institutions and to the entire humanitarian community for their commitment to and multifaceted support for this particularly vulnerable sector of the civilian population.

Finally, we wish to thank the Mexican delegation for the draft presidential statement, which my delegation supports.

**Mr. Bui The Giang** (Viet Nam): Let me join other speakers in thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on a very important topic. I also wish to thank France for its successful chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and

Armed Conflict and congratulate Mexico on its assumption of the chairmanship of that key body of the Security Council earlier this year. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2009/158) and his briefing. In addition, I am grateful to Special Representative Coomaraswamy, Under-Secretary-General Le Roy and UNICEF Executive Director Veneman for their briefings.

My delegation is pleased to learn from both United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations on the ground that tangible progress has been made in certain places in the world in the protection of children in armed conflict. The success in setting up monitoring and reporting mechanisms on grave violations of children's rights and in developing and implementing action plans, as well as other kinds of concrete commitments related to situations of armed conflict, is equally heartening.

In that connection, we commend the dedicated and effective efforts of all related institutional and individual actors, without whom such progress and success would be impossible. We especially appreciate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her team for their work in this challenging field, including their country visits, which have considerably helped to facilitate the collaboration between the United Nations and relevant partners in implementing resolution 1612 (2005).

However, my delegation is deeply concerned about the fact that, with armed conflicts escalating in many parts of the world, children continue to fall victim to killing, maiming and all other sorts of violence, including, in particular, sexual violence, recruitment and attacks targeting schools and hospitals. We reiterate our consistent position that, in situations of conflict, all parties concerned are obliged to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law. We therefore condemn all such acts of violence and abuse against children and call on the United Nations system and the rest of the international community to make greater efforts for the sake of children caught in armed conflicts.

We support the Secretary-General's recommendation that the child protection mandate of all relevant United Nations peacekeeping and political missions be further enhanced, including by formulating specific provisions for the protection of children and deploying child protection advisers. We endorse the idea of establishing appropriate strategies and coordination mechanisms among relevant Member States, United Nations peacekeeping and political missions and United Nations country teams for information exchange and cooperation on cross-border child protection concerns.

Given the long-term adverse impact of armed conflicts and related violations and abuses against children, it is our view that the Security Council should pay equal attention to all grave violations and address them accordingly. At the same time, if disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for children are to be effective and sustainable, timely and adequate human, material and financial support is essential.

Moreover, all necessary measures to be taken in that connection should be undertaken within the framework of a broader strategy of conflict prevention and response that deals with, inter alia, the root causes of armed conflict — hunger and poverty — and covers social, economic and development issues during and after conflicts. Such a strategy can and should involve and be assisted by the United Nations, particularly through close collaboration among United Nations bodies, including peacekeeping and political missions, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme and other specialized agencies.

Finally, let me emphasize the importance of education as an important means of preventing armed conflict and of addressing violations against children in conflict areas. The public — including, first and foremost, children themselves — needs to be equipped with knowledge about children's rights and ways to ensure their implementation, so that it will be willing to report cases of violations and participate in fighting them.

With that in mind, we support activities to raise public awareness about children's rights and to disseminate best practices in the protection of children in conflict areas. We strongly believe that United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF, and other international organizations can be of great help in that regard. We also encourage civil society organizations to energetically engage in and constructively contribute to such endeavours.

**Mr. Mugoya** (Uganda): We thank the Foreign Minister of Mexico for coming to New York to preside over this important meeting. We welcome the

Secretary-General's comprehensive report (S/2009/158), which covers compliance and progress towards ending the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and other grave violations. We also welcome the presence of the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Migiro, in our midst. We thank Ms. Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their briefings. My delegation is grateful to Ms. Grace Akallo, who was with us this morning and who has shared her experience, as a former abducted child, on the plight of children in armed conflict.

My delegation is pleased to note that the preparation of the report involved broad consultations with all key stakeholders, especially the country-level task forces on monitoring and reporting. We are convinced that focus on this participatory approach will yield better results in ensuring more effective protection for children affected by conflict in situations of concern.

Uganda is fully committed to and supports the various efforts by the United Nations, including those of the Security Council, to promote the protection of children in armed conflict. My delegation condemns the continuing recruitment, use and abuse of children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law.

The negative psychosocial consequences on the mental health of the affected children cannot be overemphasized. While we acknowledge that there has been significant progress as indicated in the report, we are deeply concerned at the slow pace of implementation. We have noted, for instance, that out of the total of 56 parties listed and those not listed in annex I and II of the Secretary-General's report, only four parties had signed action plans, one had signed an action plan that did not meet the required minimum standards, and there were three or four cases of ongoing dialogue to translate commitment into action plans.

Those statistics clearly demonstrate that quite a lot of work remains to be done. We therefore call upon Member States, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, country-level task forces, United Nations peacekeeping and political missions and non-governmental organizations to redouble their efforts.

The Government of Uganda signed and implemented an action plan regarding children associated with armed forces and continues to allow regular access to the United Nations to any Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) facilities upon request to monitor compliance. The report of the Secretary-General clearly attests to this by pointing out that there were no cases of recruitment and use of children by the UPDF or the now-disbanded local defence units, and that the UPDF has accordingly been de-listed.

Uganda continues to be vigilant in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005), and tremendous progress has been made, resulting in the release of many formerly abducted children and their reintegration into their families and communities. The most recent example of this commitment was the rescue, reintegration and ongoing rehabilitation of Catherine Ajok, the last of the 139 Aboke girls who were abducted by the terrorist Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), including Ms. Akallo, who was here this morning.

As we have heard from the testimony of Ms. Akollo, one of the most disturbing issues considered in the report, which is unfortunately common in most armed conflict situations, concerns sexual and gender-based violence, with young girls as the largest and most vulnerable group of victims. Uganda strongly supports the recommendations by the Secretary-General and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict that the Security Council should consider, at a minimum, including rape and other acts of grave sexual violence as additional criteria for inclusion in the annexes.

My delegation also expresses concern at the increase in the reported cases of indiscriminate killings of children caught in situations of armed conflict and war as well as attacks on schools. We condemn these inhuman acts and call upon the perpetrators to desist from carrying out such gross atrocities. We also call upon the international community to take decisive action against all those committing crimes and violations against children, including the LRA.

Finally, my delegation calls upon the parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to strengthen measures geared towards preventing the recruitment of

children into armed forces. We welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation concerning effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes as vital for the well-being of children associated with armed forces and groups. It is therefore imperative that the respective Governments and donors ensure that such programmes, including the provision of social services and amenities, be community-based and receive adequate and timely resources and funding for their long-term sustainability. We agree with the observation that this is an increasingly crucial factor for durable peace and security.

We are grateful to the delegation of Mexico for preparing the draft presidential statement, which my delegation fully supports.

**Mr. İlkin** (Turkey): Allow me to welcome the presence of Her Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico in the Security Council this morning. We very much appreciate her gesture and desire to attend and preside over this important meeting. It underlines the importance Mexico attaches to this issue. Allow me to also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, for all her efforts to protect children against every form of cruelty and violence. Furthermore, I congratulate Mexico for assuming the chairmanship of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and wish it every success. Last but not least, I must express our deep appreciation for the extensive work covered by the Working Group during the chairmanship of France.

Children are our future. We must protect them from every danger, at all costs. Yet countless children all over the world suffer every day from the most horrible kinds of treatment, being forced to fight as soldiers and being subjected to unspeakable forms of abuse and violence. Listening to Grace Akallo and hearing her moving story, we have been reminded once again of the grave nature of the issue we are dealing with today. We fully see once again how important it is to work unrelentingly against the use of children in armed conflict and how imperative it is for the Council to fully assume its responsibilities in this regard. In this context, the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/158) provides us with a very useful basis to work from. We fully agree with his observations. We also support his recommendations.

The loss of the lives of children in armed conflict not only is a tragedy of the first degree, but also deprives nations of their future. In addition, minors who are raped or must face grave sexual violence are physically and mentally wounded forever. We must protect and save our young and future generations from such an intolerable shame and burden. The cultural values of humanity throughout the world require the protection of children. No one should feel they can trample this cardinal right and principle. We have zero tolerance for the abuse of children under any pretext.

A number of criteria and issues were elaborated during the deliberations of the Working Group. I need not go into the details. However, we believe that the following points should be borne in mind. There are wide and justified expectations of the work of the Security Council on all issues and problems related to children. We all have to encourage and urge States to continue to cooperate with the Working Group. And we have to expedite and facilitate the work of our Group by considering reports in a timely manner.

Turkey is party to each and every United Nations instrument related to the rights of children. Of course, these United Nations instruments have become very much an integral part of our national legislation. We also support initiatives, and are party to various initiatives, outside the framework of the United Nations promoting the rights of children.

We should do everything possible to hold accountable before justice the violators of children's rights. There should be no impunity for the criminals and violators if we are to put an end to these horrific crimes. There is still a long way ahead of us in achieving that objective. We must remain committed and must not refrain from taking the necessary steps, as appropriate. Turkey is resolved to be an active partner in this honourable journey.

**Mr. Parham** (United Kingdom): I would like to start, Madam Minister, by welcoming you to the Council today. We are delighted that you are able to preside over this important meeting. I would like also to thank the Mexican delegation, and in particular Ambassador Heller, for the excellent Mexican leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

We associate ourselves fully with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

We welcomed the opportunity this morning to hear from the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, and from representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and of UNICEF. We were also struck by the powerful personal testimony of Ms. Grace Akallo.

I would like to pay tribute to the outstanding work that the United Nations agencies and funds continue to undertake in the cause of children affected by armed conflict. I would like to focus particularly on the untiring work of the Special Representative and her team and to recognize the pivotal role of non-governmental organizations and civil society groups in the field. That this strand of Security Council work achieves such impact on the ground is testament to their dedication and to Ms. Coomaraswamy's leadership.

When the Security Council established its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, it did so with a clear sense that the new structure would need to be able to adapt to changing realities. It is now time to address some of the wider challenges of the child protection agenda and some of the inefficiencies of the original model. We have said repeatedly that the Working Group does not make use of all the tools available to it in support of child prbtection. That needs to change in two ways.

First, we strongly believe that it is time for the Council to expand the criteria for listing parties that commit abuses against children. That should be matched by measures to enhance the effectiveness of the Working Group. In particular, we should expand the monitoring and reporting mechanism's trigger to include both acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence and acts of killing and maiming that are committed against children. That would be consistent with the Secretary-General's recommendations and would address the deeply worrying patterns that are set out in his reports.

Secondly, it is vital that we improve the monitoring of the implementation of the Working Group's recommendations. We need better feedback on what works and what does not. The Secretary-General's reports to the Working Group should include concrete information on progress made by listed parties. That may require some additional administrative support from the Secretariat, but the impact would be significant.

I would like to turn briefly to several conflict situations where we have particular concerns about the impact on children. My Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, is today visiting Sri Lanka with his French counterpart, Bernard Kouchner. Tens of thousands of civilians, including many children, are at extreme risk as a result of the conflict and the dire humanitarian situation there. The Security Council has made clear its support for the efforts of the United Nations, led by the Secretary-General. We continue to urge all parties to respect international humanitarian law and to take the necessary steps to ensure the safe evacuation and protection of and assistance to the civilian population, and especially the children, caught up in that conflict.

I would like also to highlight our concern about forced labour in the military in Burma. Personnel responsible for underage recruitment have been identified. Bringing them to account would demonstrate the commitment of the Burmese Government to cooperate with the United Nations.

In Nepal, we hope to see the Government implement its commitment to Ms. Coomaraswamy to release minors remaining in the cantonments.

I note that Al-Qaida is a new addition to the annexes of the Secretary-General's report for their use, and their wilful killing and maiming, of children in Iraq. The measures contained in Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) should be brought to bear in preventing such crimes.

Today's debate is another step forward in the Security Council's work on these important issues. The international community must be prepared to take action against those individuals and groups that commit egregious abuses against children and that refuse to undertake the remedial action demanded of them. We look to the Working Group to lead such action.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now set aside my functions as President of the Security Council and make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Mexico.

On behalf of Mexico, I thank Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy for her introduction of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158).

It is clear that, in spite of the progress that has been made, children continue to be direct and

defenceless victims of armed conflicts, and that we must intensify our efforts to change that situation. Mexico upholds the principle of the best interests of the child and considers that the international community must redouble its efforts to provide broad and effective protection to children affected by armed conflict.

The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has worked hard, initially under French and now under Mexican leadership, to ensure that all parties involved in a dispute respect the rights that are unambiguously guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

We condemn all acts that jeopardize the integrity of children, such as attacks against schools; the recruitment or use of child soldiers; rape and other sexual violence, which affects girls in particular; abduction; denial of humanitarian access; maiming; and, of course, killing.

For us, it is clear that violations of the norms of international humanitarian law are international crimes. We therefore consider that the work of the International Criminal Court in the case against Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, who is accused of conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 and using them in hostilities, underlines the importance of fighting impunity for those who violate the human rights of persons as vulnerable as children and who violate international humanitarian law. There are millions of children in situations of armed conflict who are subjected to systematic violations of their rights, a situation that demands that we act with extreme urgency.

As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, and above all as a State that is aware of its responsibility as a member of the international community, Mexico invites the States that have not yet done so to ratify those and other instruments aimed at protecting those who today are affected by the scourge of war, exploitation, violence and abuse.

Mexico recognizes the important work of United Nations agencies and programmes, in particular UNICEF, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the extraordinary efforts of civil society organizations and individuals who, selflessly and often at the cost of their own lives, work every day to help children affected by armed conflict.

The Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. On that basis, Mexico calls on the Security Council, within the framework of its mandate, to continue addressing the repercussions of armed conflict on children and to promote specific actions aimed at fulfilling the recommendations of the Working Group, including imposing sanctions on the parties in conflict.

As Chairman of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Mexico will promote actions to put an end to the atrocities committed against children, with particular attention to refugees; displaced, separated and kidnapped children; those affected by AIDS/HIV; the disabled; and those subject to sexual exploitation and detention, as well as to address the consequences of the trafficking of weapons, anti-personnel mines and other types of munition on the lives and future of children.

Mexico calls on the international community to strengthen its efforts to protect children, in particular, first, to slow their recruitment and prevent their reincorporation into armed groups; secondly, to guarantee humanitarian access in every situation; thirdly, to contribute to children's physical protection by preventing their maiming as a result of landmines and the proliferation of arms; fourthly, to cooperate with and assist States that suffer the consequences of armed conflict in order to strengthen or establish programmes for the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers into their communities and families; and fifthly, to promote assistance, with due consideration for age and gender, that includes health care, psychological support and education, always taking into consideration the well-being of children.

I wish once again to thank all the members of the Security Council for their confidence in and support for Mexico in its chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and to reiterate my country's commitment to this issue.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now call on the representative of the Philippines.

**Mr. Davide** (Philippines): Let me begin by expressing the Philippines' solidarity with Mexico, its Government and its people as they face a new crisis that could affect the world.

The Philippines is grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council following the issuance of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158). With the high priority that it gives to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, including in the context of armed conflict, the Philippines has always considered this issue to be of special importance and continues to view with utmost seriousness any negative report in this regard.

Owing to time constraints, I shall only read salient portions of my statement, the full text of which will be circulated to the Security Council.

The Philippines' commitment to the protection of children affected by armed conflict was particularly demonstrated when its Government facilitated the visit to the Philippines from 7 to 13 December 2008 of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. During that visit, she held dialogues with key officials from the Office of the President and relevant departments and offices of the Government. She also met with local Government officials, civil society actors and some women and children affected by armed conflict. In the course of these meetings, she saw the embodiment of our national comprehensive programme on children involved in armed conflict. I would like to highlight that, in order to drive the implementation of the programme, the Government continues to mobilize an inter-agency committee on children involved in armed conflict to work closely with the Commission on the Welfare of Children in overseeing actions to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of our national programme and to monitor the Philippines' compliance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Since Ms. Coomaraswamy's visit, our enhanced action has, first, increased awareness and capacity-training on children and armed conflict at the national and provincial levels, including institutionalizing this response in the training modules on national disaster and emergency management; secondly, developed rapid child-focused strategies within the various concerned Government agencies to assess, formulate and undertake action on the situation of children affected by armed conflict; and thirdly, expedited the submission of the report of the Philippines on the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children and armed conflict. Furthermore, in September 2009, the Philippines will be ready to report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on its compliance with the Convention.

As an extraordinary measure, Ms. Coomaraswamy had an opportunity to meet with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to discuss concerns about the presence of children within the ranks of that rebel group. Allow me to reiterate the position of the Philippines that engaging non-State armed groups, including for the purpose of securing the protection of children, should be approached in a most careful manner. Since the situation of children in armed conflict arises against a complex background, any strategy to protect children in this case should be in harmony with the larger peace processes that the Government has launched with non-State groups in the country and in full coordination with the Philippine Government.

In fact, we already include specific provisions on children's protection in all peace negotiations, peace agreements and ceasefires. The protection of children has been mainstreamed into the peace process with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples' Army-National Democratic Front through the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. The Tripoli Agreement of 2001 between the Philippine Government and MILF provides a basis for expanding the protection regime for children affected by conflict.

We wish to recall what we stated in our intervention at the open debate of the Security Council on this agenda item on 17 July 2008. The Philippine Constitution enshrines the promotion and protection of the rights of children. The Philippines also maintains a vast arsenal of statutes on the promotion and protection of the rights of children, the most relevant of which is Republic Act No. 7610, providing for stronger deterrence of and special protection against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination. The Act prohibits the use of children in armed combat, protects them from armed conflicts, establishes children as zones of peace, and provides for the evacuation of

children during armed conflict. The Philippines is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children and armed conflict.

The Security Council may recall that its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has commended the Philippines for the high standard of its legal framework and policies for the welfare and protection of children. I am pleased to report that the Philippine Government has started the process of amending the act I just mentioned for the purpose of, inter alia, effectively operationalizing the concept of children as zones of peace and ensuring provisions for the non-criminal treatment and non-judicial rehabilitation of affected children, as recommended by Ms. Coomaraswamy. The Working Group has also lauded the Philippines for its cooperation with the United Nations regarding the appropriate establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism in the Philippines. Indeed, the collaborative work between my Government and the United Nations has begun positively, and I would like to assure the Council of my Government's commitment to continuing this cooperation.

I would like to briefly address some specific matters addressed in the section of the Secretary-General's report affecting the Philippines.

I cannot overemphasize the commitment of the Government of the Philippines to ensuring that children's rights are protected, including in the context of armed conflict. Therefore, any allegation against our armed forces is viewed with the highest degree of concern and seriousness. My Government assures the Security Council that all its mechanisms for investigation and military justice are fully in place to deal, as appropriate, with such cases.

With reference to paragraphs 122, 124 and 126, the armed forces of the Philippines are conducting a review of their procedures with a view to improving and reporting on and the handling, treatment and turnover of affected children; ensuring that directives to field commanders concerning child protection sensitivity and measures are carried out in their operations; and strengthening their links with our social development agencies to ensure the effective rehabilitation of these children. Also, to enhance accountability and facilitate coordination, both the military and the police have human rights offices that function as the focal points for dialogue with the United Nations country team on these issues.

As regards paragraph 125, the military has just re-emphasized in their directives the importance of respecting schools and ensuring that they remain safe for children. With reference to paragraph 127, it would be helpful if clarification could be provided in regard to the need to bring release and reintegration measures in line with good practices. To briefly describe our procedures in this area, as a matter of priority, our social workers trace the affected children's parents and relatives, who are given psychosocial and even livelihood support for the effective reintegration of their children. In cases where this is not possible, suitable adoption measures, as appropriate, are considered.

I believe that it is our common wish to eventually clear the lists of offending parties. The Security Council may wish to assess the level of commitment, the extent of mechanisms, efforts and progress in implementation, and the outcomes on the ground as indicators for the de-listing of parties. As the Philippines remains focused on these goals, the Council may consider a stronger focus on the encouragement and inspiration that de-listing can bring to sustaining the efforts to protect children in armed conflict.

Indeed, what the Philippines has accomplished so far in the area of children and armed conflict, and its excellent cooperation with the United Nations, now justify dropping it from the countries that are listed in annex II in accordance with Council resolution 1612 (2005). Justice demands, and due process supports, such de-listing. Not to do that may perpetuate a double standard of justice vis-à-vis other areas of more serious concerns in many places in this suffering world.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I appeal to all speakers to make their statements as brief as possible and to distribute their statements, if necessary.

I call next on the representative of Canada.

**Mr. McNee** (Canada) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate the Foreign Minister of Mexico for her statement and congratulate Mexico upon having assumed the chair of the Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We are convinced that Mexico will discharge its duties

with the same conviction and efficiency as was shown by the French chair.

This debate was introduced today by very useful statements by United Nations representatives and by the eloquent and necessary testimony by Ms. Grace Akallo.

Canada welcomes this open debate and the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158). This debate provides us another opportunity to bring to the attention of the Council the severity of continued acts of violence against children. Too often today, we see the devastating effects that armed conflict has on children, including the profound repercussions on their living conditions. Sri Lanka, Somalia, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrate this tragedy. Children are injured, killed and displaced and become victims of sexual and gender-based violence. They are directly or indirectly recruited as soldiers. To that we add separation from their families and the impossibility of pursuing their education. Sadly, this list is not exhaustive.

Canada commends the Security Council for its innovative initiatives in building a framework for protecting children in situations of armed conflict. We applaud the work of the Secretary-General and his team. In particular, I would like to thank Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, for her commitment, her vigorous advocacy and for the wealth of reporting by her office.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada strongly supports Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and the implementation of an effective monitoring and reporting mechanism for violations against children. We would like to recognize the tremendous work of UNICEF and the non-governmental organization and civil society actors who contribute to the 1612 monitoring and reporting mechanism. The impact of resolution 1612 (2005) is real and measurable, as demonstrated by the release of children from the ranks of armed groups around the world. The monitoring and reporting mechanism has now been implemented or put in place in all the situations listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's 2007 report (S/2007/757). This is in itself a significant achievement. We hope to see further advancement of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, engaging with youth and strengthening the mechanism for the security of these children, to improve the protection provided.

Canada would like to commend the work of the Security Council Working Group created by resolution 1612 (2005). We would also like to acknowledge the strong support provided by the Secretariat to the Working Group. The actionable conclusions and guidance issued by the Working Group have demonstrated the Council's commitment to prevent crimes against children in situations of conflict and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable under national and international law. We hope that in the coming months the Working Group will be able to travel to the field for concrete exposure that would better inform its work.

Thanks to the hard work of these individuals and organizations, there is a much greater awareness of the terrible plight of these children. There remains, however, an environment of impunity for those who persist in committing the most serious crimes against children in situations of armed conflict, which has been highlighted by the Special Representative and the Secretary-General. In this regard, let me take this opportunity to register once again Canada's strong view that the existing monitoring and reporting mechanism should be triggered by all six grave violations against children outlined in resolution 1612 (2005).

We must continue to uphold the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and to strengthen and expand them. Violations of resolution 1612 (2005) continue, including a disturbing increase in rape and other sexual violations against both girls and boys. We have an opportunity before us to fill an important gap in the child protection framework, including through negotiation of a new resolution. It should provide for a monitoring and reporting mechanism triggered by the recruitment and use of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, intentional killing and maiming of children, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children by parties to armed conflict. Canada urges the Council to take concrete actions to make this happen.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

**Mrs. Viotti** (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, our full solidarity in this time when Mexico is confronting the serious

swine flu epidemic. I also wish to express the appreciation of my delegation for the presence of Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa at this discussion. Her participation adds even more political significance to our dealing with the important topic that brings us together today. It also underlines Mexico's commitment to this issue and celebrates Mexico's competent presidency of the Council.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement this morning and for the report before us (S/2009/158). I also wish to commend Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy for the remarkable work she has been doing. I wish to recognize as well the important contribution that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNICEF bring to our common endeavours.

The moving testimony of Grace Akallo is a reminder to all of us of the need to pursue and strengthen our efforts to protect children in armed conflict.

My delegation is pleased with the progress achieved in the implementation of Council resolutions on the protection of children in armed conflict, especially resolution 1612 (2005). Monitoring and reporting mechanisms have been established for all situations listed in annexes I and II to the Secretary-General's 2007 report (S/2007/757). Just as important, new action plans have either been signed or are being discussed with parties to conflicts. We encourage the continuation of such efforts, always in close consultation with interested Member States.

We also welcome progress made in mainstreaming children and armed conflict issues in United Nations peacekeeping and political missions. One aspect that deserves particular attention is the protection of displaced persons camps, where recruiting of children is reported to take place. Failing to protect families and individuals from such a scourge not only means inflicting new suffering on people already struck by tragedy, but threatens the Organization and its missions with unacceptable discredit.

There has also been progress in specific conflict situations. However, in reviewing the document, my delegation was particularly struck by instances where a variety of State actors were engaged in acts of violence against children or in behaviour that endangered them. Although such acts are to be condemned regardless of their perpetrators, States bear a special responsibility. They must lead by example in their own territories and in those territories where their forces are placed for whatever reason and purpose. From the mountains in Afghanistan to the towns in Gaza and the villages in Africa, children in armed conflicts must find in States an active protector and never an agent of violence, even if unintended.

Brazil is particularly concerned with all forms of sexual violence against children in armed conflicts. Not only are such crimes particularly traumatizing but they may also pose further obstacles to future reconciliation. We therefore support efforts to better monitor violations, provide reliable information on sexual abuse by forces of all origins and improve coordination among United Nations agencies. The proposed inclusion of rape and other grave sexual violence as a trigger for inclusion in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report certainly merits careful consideration in light of the mandate of the Security Council. In so doing, Council members should reflect on the most appropriate way to address killing and maiming of children.

Brazil is also concerned with the reintegration of children in countries emerging from conflict. The Peacebuilding Commission has an important role to play in that matter. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes must address the recovery and development of children affected by violence committed by armed forces.

The report of the Secretary-General is yet another powerful call to Member States to fight violence against children in armed conflicts. We should heed the call. In so doing, we will help lay a solid basis for peace, stability and human development not only in countries emerging from conflict, but also in their regions. Importantly, the future of those children will have been safeguarded and our mission accomplished.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

**Mr. Palouš** (Czech Republic): First, let me express our sympathy with the people of Mexico for the outbreak of the flu epidemic.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Croatia and

the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, let me thank the presidency, Mexico, for organizing an open debate and reaffirm the European Union's strong support to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would also like to express our support for the work of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, whose outreach activities and field visits contribute significantly to improving the situation of children in armed conflict. On behalf of the European Union, I would like to thank UNICEF and other United Nations agencies and implementation partners for their vital field work and the input they have made to the Secretary-General's current report on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158).

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the situation of children affected by armed conflicts around the world and endorses the current report of the Secretary-General as well as the recommendations contained therein. More efforts should be made to eliminate harmful practices affecting girls and boys in armed conflict. Moreover, the European Union highlights the need to continue to address the short- and long-term impacts of armed conflict on children in an effective, sustainable and comprehensive manner.

This year we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the European Union wishes to use this occasion to call on all countries to universally implement that Convention and its Optional Protocol. The European Union also calls on all countries to adhere to and implement the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, adopted in February 2007.

The European Union emphasizes the need for the close coordination of policies regarding the protection of civilians across the scope of United Nations activities in key areas such as human rights, gender equality, rule of law, development policies, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform.

The European Union welcomes the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict established by Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), especially the progress on the design and implementation of action plans as indicated in the Secretary-General's report. In that respect, the European Union reiterates the importance of providing specific child protection advisers in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions. In order to see even more progress in the future, access to all parties involved, including non-State parties, must be ensured.

The European Union calls on Governments and all parties concerned to abolish and prevent the practice of recruitment and use of children in armed forces or armed groups in clear violation of international legal obligations and other relevant principles. Moreover, the European Union reaffirms its full support of the work of the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity for the recruitment and use of child soldiers and as a dissuasive instrument for potential perpetrators. The European Union emphasizes the need to ensure a more intensive cooperation between the Working Group and the relevant sanctions committees.

Furthermore, we support the call to the Security Council to take appropriate account of all categories of grave violations. The European Union encourages the Council to take concrete measures vis-à-vis those parties listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report, including the use of sanctions for repeat offenders who have shown themselves unwilling to engage in meaningful dialogue to put an end to violations.

Accordingly, the European Union remains deeply concerned with the increase of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, both boys and girls, in armed conflict. Action needs to be taken without delay against those egregious violations. Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) are relevant in that regard and must be implemented. The European Union urges the Security Council to expand the criteria for violations that trigger the listing of a party in annexes attached to the report of the Secretary-General, and to include parties to armed conflict that commit rape and other grave sexual violence against children, as well as the intentional killing and maiming of children.

The European Union is firmly committed to addressing the impact of armed conflict on children in an effective, sustainable and comprehensive manner. The European Union continues to implement updated guidelines on children and armed conflict through the monitoring and reporting mechanisms in 19 priority countries, and cooperates with the United Nations, national and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society on the basis of resolution 1612 (2005). A vast range of child protection projects are financed by the European Union through various instruments. Those include 15 million euros for the 2008 thematic programme, Investing in People, to support children affected by armed conflict and trafficking; 5 million euros for the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights — towards children's rights; in addition to substantial broad humanitarian support.

Further, the European Union advocates a systematic mainstreaming of human rights, gender issues and child protection into the European Security and Defence Policy operations on the basis of the Checklist for the Integration of the Protection of Children affected by Armed Conflict, and promotes a comprehensive approach to the issue through humanitarian, development, security and human rights instruments. Those commitments are further articulated in the European Commission communication entitled, "A Special Place for Children in European Union External Action".

The European Union strongly encourages the Council to improve and enhance, without further delay, its response to violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict, in particular sexual violence, building upon the experience and lessons learned in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005), and taking into consideration the recommendations proposed by the Secretary-General in his current report. The European Union looks forward to the adoption of an action-oriented presidential statement by the Security Council as a first step in that respect.

Let me assure the Council of the European Union's continued commitment to this important issue.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.15 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.*